

Message Text

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P R 311429Z OCT 74

FM AMEMBASSY NASSAU

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6124

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SUBJ: MEDIA COVERAGE OF ALLEGED "PLOT TO KIDNAP AMBASSADOR"

REF: NASSAU 1822

SUMMARY: THE FOLLOWING IS A SUMMARY OF NEWSPAPER STORIES APPEARING LOCALLY ON APPREHENSION, SEARCH AND QUESTIONING OF FOUR INDIVIDUALS IN CONNECTION WITH ALLEGED "PLOT TO KIDNAP US AMBASSADOR" HERE. COVERAGE IS NOT ALARMIST AND FOCUSES ON PROTESTS OF THOSE QUESTIONED, AND RESPONSES BY POLICE OFFICIALS INTERVIEWED, RATHER THAN ON SUPPOSED ACTION PLANNED AGAINST THE AMBASSADOR. EMBASSY ALSO COMMENTS ON ORGANIZATIONS MENTIONED IN ARTICLES. END SUMMARY.

1. TRIBUNE, THE EVENING NEWSPAPER, BROKE STORY OCTOBER 29, REPORTEDLY IN SPITE OF LOCAL POLICE UNWILLINGNESS TO PUBLICIZE IT. TRIBUNE FRONT PAGE HEADLINE READS: "TWO TOP PDP (NOTE: PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC PARTY) OFFICERS HELD IN ARMS PROBE." SUBHEAD READS: "POLICE ALLEGE PLOT TO KIDNAP US AMBASSADOR." STORY REPORTS THAT LAWRENCE MCKINNEY, PDP CHAIRMAN, AND HIS VICE CHAIRMAN JOHN HANNA WERE HELD FOR 5-1/2 HOURS OCTOBER 26 BY BAHAMIAN CID AND SPECIAL BRANCH OFFICIALS. POLICE WERE ACTING ON WARRANTS ISSUED BY MAGIS-

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TRATE EARLY SATURDAY MORNING. CID COMMISSIONER PAUL THOMPSON

QUOTED AS DENYING POLITICAL MOTIVES TO APPREHENSION AND SAYING THAT "THEY WERE PICKED UP AS TWO INDIVIDUALS, FOLLOWING INFORMATION THEY WERE IN POSSESSION OF FIREARMS AND EXPLOSIVES...THEIR PREMISES WERE SEARCHED, NOTHING WAS FOUND AND THEY WERE RELEASED."

2. TRIBUNE GOES ON TO QUOTE THOMPSON AS SAYING MEN WERE HELD ON SUSPICION OF FIREARMS POSSESSION BUT "WE HAD SECONDARY INFORMATION, WHICH WE DID NOT REGARD AS VERY RELIABLE (ABOUT A PLOT TO KIDNAP THE AMBASSADOR), AND AS WE HAD THEM IN CUSTODY DECIDED TO SPEAK TO THEM ABOUT IT." PDP SOURCES REPORTED AS ALLEGING POLICE HARASSMENT OF THEIR FLEDGLING ORGANIZATION, POINTING TO FACT THAT ALTHOUGH WARRANTS CONFINED TO SEARCH FOR FIREARMS (AS THEY MUST BE UNDER 1969 BAHAMIAN FIREARMS ACT) POLICE ALSO TOOK PDP BROCHURES AND OTHER PAPERS FROM THE HOMES SEARCHED. PDP SPOKESMAN ALSO CLAIMED THE TWO APPREHENDED "WERE TOLD THAT THEY WERE SUSPECTED OF LEADING A GROUP WHOM THE POLICE WERE INFORMED PLANNED TO ABDUCT THE AMERICAN AMBASSADOR THAT SAME EVENING (NOTE: OCTOBER 26)... THEY WERE ALSO TOLD THAT THEY WERE SUSPECTED OF RECEIVING BOOKLETS FROM CUBA AND TEACHING COMMUNISM TO THE YOUNG PEOPLE (IN NASSAU'S SLUM AREA)". ONE OF THOSE APPREHENDED ALLEGED THAT A JUNIOR POLICE OFFICER TOLD HIM THAT CID CHIEF THOMPSON HAD WARNED THE POLICE COMMISSIONER NOT TO ORDER THE ARRESTS BECAUSE THEY WERE POLITICALLY MOTIVATED. PDP SPOKESMAN SAID HE TRIED TO SEE PRIME MINISTER PINDLING SATURDAY NIGHT TO PROTEST THE ARRESTS BUT WAS UNSUCCESSFUL. TRIBUNE ALSO RAN SMALL FRONT PAGE ITEM REPORTING THAT WESLEY CAMPBELL, FORMER MEMBER OF VANGUARD NATIONALIST AND SOCIALIST PARTY (VNSP), AND HUBERT KNOWLES, A LOCAL PRINTER, HAD BEEN ARRESTED MORNING OF OCTOBER 29 FOR SUSPICION OF POSSESSION OF FIREARMS, BUT ITEM MADE NO CONNECTION WITH OCTOBER 26 ARRESTS OR ALLEGED PLOT.

3. GUARDIAN, MORNING NEWSPAPER, OCTOBER 30 FRONT PAGE HEADLINES: "POLICE QUESTION FOUR IN ALLEGED KIDNAP PLOT." LEAD READS: "THE INTENSIVE INTERROGATION OF FOUR MEN, THREE OF WHOM ARE ASSOCIATED WITH POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS, HAS BEEN BRANDED BY LOCAL SOURCES AS 'EARLY SYMPTOMS OF THE BAHAMAS BECOMING A POLICE STATE'." STORY REPORTS THAT CID CHIEF THOMPSON DEFENDED APPREHENSION BY ASSERTING THAT "FOLLOWING LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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INFORMATION THAT A PLOT WAS UNDERFOOT (SIC) TO ABDUCT AMERICAN AMBASSADOR TO THE BAHAMAS SEYMOUR WEISS, THE POLICE IMMEDIATELY TOOK STEPS TO ABORT ANY SUCH MOVE" (NOTE: QUOTE IS NOT DIRECTLY FROM THOMPSON). ARTICLE IDENTIFIES MCKINNEY AND HANNA AS PDP LEADERS, CAMPBELL AS UNSUCCESSFUL CANDIDATE FOR BY-ELECTION LAST YEAR ON VANGUARD TICKET, AND KNOWLES AS UNIDENTIFIED WITH ANY POLITICAL GROUP. STORY SAYS CAMPBELL ARRESTED AND SEARCHED WITHOUT WARRANT. THOMPSON QUOTED AS SAYING "I

DON'T KNOW WHAT POLITICAL PARTY (THE FOUR) BELONG TO," AND ASSERTING THAT THIS WAS NORMAL POLICE ACTION UNDER FIREARMS ACT: "I WAS NOT INVESTIGATING POLITICS, WE WERE SEARCHING FOR FIREARMS AND EXPLOSIVES, AND ALSO HAD INFORMATION THAT THERE WAS A PLOT TO KIDNAP THE US AMBASSADOR, (BUT) THE REAL REASON FOR THE EXECUTION OF THE SEARCH WARRANTS WAS (TO INVESTIGATE POSSESSION OF FIREARMS AND EXPLOSIVES".

4. PDP SOURCES AGAIN QUOTED AS ALLEGING GCOB HARRASSMENT. PDP OFFICIAL SAID THAT POLICE QUESTIONED TWO PDP DETAINEES FOR CONNECTIONS WITH GROUP KNOWN AS TWENTIETH CENTURY REVOLUTIONARIES, BUT ARTICLE SAYS CID CHIEF DENIED THIS. PDP SOURCE QUOTED AS HAVING "STRONGLY DENIED" THAT PDP "WAS IN ANY WAY INVOLVED WITH THE TCR." SAME SOURCE THEN USED REMAINDER OF GUARDIAN INTERVIEW TO MAKE USUAL POLITICAL STATEMENTS ATTACKING PRIME MINISTER PINDLING AND GOVERNING PROGRESSIVE LIBERAL PARTY (PLP).
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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SY-04 SCCT-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03

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5. COMMENT: PDP WAS FORMED IN APRIL 1974, AT SAME TIME PLP QUASI-DISSIDENTS EDMUND MOXEY, CARLTON FRANCIS AND OSCAR JOHNSON WERE PUBLICLY ATTACKING THEIR PLP LEADERSHIP FOR TURNING AWAY FROM THE ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED. PDP CLAIMED CREDIT FOR ORGANIZING DEMONSTRATIONS IN DOWNTOWN NASSAU IN SUPPORT OF THOSE THREE PLP MEMBERS, ALTHOUGH THE LATTER SCOFFED AT

THE CLAIM AND BOTH PUBLICLY AND PRIVATELY REFUSED TO HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH THE NEW PDP. PDP HAS AN ESTIMATED EIGHT ACTIVE MEMBERS, MOST OF THEM FAILED POLITICAL HOPEFULS FROM OTHER POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS WHICH ARE NOW EITHER DEFUNCT OR HAVE REJECTED THEM. PDP APPEARS TO HAVE NO CONSISTENT POLICY AND HAS BEEN EXTREMELY OPPORTUNISTIC IN SEIZING ON ISSUES ON BOTH THE LEFT AND RIGHT OF THE LOCAL POLITICAL SPECTRUM. THE ONLY SIGNIFICANT PDP ACTIVITY IN THE PAST FEW MONTHS HAS BEEN TO GET ITS RATHER CONFUSED PRESS RELEASES PERIODICALLY PRINTED IN LOCAL MEDIA.

6. TWENTIETH CENTURY REVOLUTIONARIES WAS ORGANIZED ABOUT THE SAME TIME BUT HAS BEEN EVEN LESS EFFECTIVE. MEDIA REFUSES TO PRINT TCR'S SEMI-LITERATE RELEASES BECAUSE THEY ARE UNSIGNED. GROUP IS YOUNG, WITH ESTIMATED LESS THAN HALF-DOZEN ACTIVE MEMBERS, COMPOSED CHIEFLY ON UNEMPLOYED HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES. LIKE PDP (WITH WHICH NO PREVIOUS CONNECTION HAS EVER BEEN HINTED), TCR HAS NO CONSISTENT POSITION AND ESPOUSES AD HOC LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CRITICISMS OF PRESENT GCOB RATHER THAN IDEOLOGY. WHILE TCR HAS ON ONE OCCASION CALLED FOR "TURBULENT REVOLUTION" AND ADVOCATED SOCIALISM FOR THE BAHAMAS, IT HAS ALSO SOUGHT TO APPEAL TO THE CONSERVATIVE LABOR MOVEMENT. WESLEY CAMPBELL, A FORMER GRADE SCHOOL TEACHER, WAS EXPELLED FROM THE VANGUARD PARTY LAST SPRING BECAUSE OF PERSONAL DISAGREEMENTS WITH VNSP LEADERSHIP, AND HAS BEEN RUMORED TO BE INTERESTED IN GETTING THE TCR OFF THE GROUND.

7. EMBASSY IS UNDERTAKING FOLLOW-UP WITH GCOB TO INVESTIGATE SUBSTANCE IF ANY OF ALLEGED PLOT AND MAKE UP AND CHARACTER OF PERSONS AND GROUPS POSSIBLY INVOLVED. ONE CONCERN IS THAT EVEN IF THE PRESENT ALLEGATION PROVES TO BE WITHOUT REAL SUBSTANCE, PUBLICITY GIVEN IT MAY PROVE SELF-FULFILLING AND GIVE RISE TO MORE SERIOUS PROBLEMS IN THE FUTURE.
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